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SUBJECT: UNIONS IN KISSIDOUGOU SAY THEY WERE READY TO STRIKE

REF: A) CONAKRY 0007

B) CONAKRY 0010

C) CONAKRY 0029

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Union officials in Kissidougou saw the events of early January (reftels) as a success for the reform movement in Guinea. Though Conakry union leaders postponed the general strike, Kissidougou union members said they were ready to mobilize support for the consensus government. While the unions say the pace of reform has been slow, they reportedly view the consensus government as the only viable vehicle for change in Guinea. The meeting suggested that the unions, at least in Kissidougou, are united behind their Conakry leaders and ready to support whatever course of action deemed necessary. END SUMMARY.

Success After a Major Blow

¶2. (SBU) During the course of a four-day visit to central Guinea, Conoff met with union leaders in the provincial capital of Kissidougou, 650 kilometers from Conakry. Union leaders included Mr. Fantamady Camara, a member of the Confederation National de Travailleurs Guineennes (CNTG), and Keoulen Kourouma and Adonis Namory Keita, members of the Union Syndicale de Travailleurs Guineennes (USTG). They met with Conoff to discuss the current political situation and union plans to resume a nationwide strike on January 10, which was called off late on January 9.

¶3. (SBU) Mr. Camara saw President Conte's dismissal of Communication Minister Justin Morel as a major blow to the consensus government and a violation of the January 27 Accords. In his words, not only was Morel "one of the best elements in government," but "every child on the street knew his name." All three union officials said Conte timed the dismissal to coincide with the anniversary of the 2007 strikes. The dismissal, they said, forced Guineans to focus on political turmoil rather than Guinea's lack of economic progress. According to the unions, Conte wants to weaken the consensus government before the upcoming legislative elections.

¶4. (SBU) Nevertheless, the union members said the postponed strike was a success. Mr. Kourouma said that Guineans now know that the political struggle between Conte and Kouyate is out in the open. The people were ready to mobilize, he said, and the strikes were only postponed, not cancelled, implying that the unions are ready to resume the strike when necessary.

The Way Forward

¶5. (SBU) Union members said the consensus government is the only viable vehicle for moving the political reform process forward. (COMMENT: More than once, however, the members emphasized that "the road is long," indicating that they might not be completely satisfied with the progress that has been made. END COMMENT.)

¶ 6. (SBU) The group also said that political parties have failed in Guinea. They said that Conte has effectively neutered the parties by putting them in ethnic and regional boxes, preventing broader coalitions from forming. For example, they said that when Conte travels in Guinea, he is reportedly quick to say that particular ethnic groups belong in certain parts of the country, and that they should not mix. The unions said that the parties have not made education and public outreach a priority, nor have they been an effective conduit of political change.

¶ 7. (SBU) The unions said that Guinea's youth found their political voice for the first time in last year's strikes. They added that the youth movement, however, remains disorganized, and the political parties have not offered leadership to the "chest-beaters" and "rock-throwers" who take to the streets in times of unrest. Union members said they now see organization of youths as their responsibility. Only the unions, they said, could educate and rally the youth and unite the country behind the consensus government.

COMMENT

¶ 8. (SBU) The CNTG and the USTG seemed to be jockeying for union leadership in Kissidougou, echoing underlying political divisions within the Unions-Intersyndicale in Conakry. During the course of the discussion, the members of the two unions vied for Conoff's attention, both wanting to be first to answer questions, even though what they said was essentially the same. When discussing politics, the unions never identified different factions within the presidency, giving Conte credit for orchestrating the recent tensions. All three representatives see their unions playing political roles beyond what the constitution currently envisions, which only allows political parties to participate in electoral processes. They consistently downplayed the role of the parties and

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reiterated that the consensus government and the unions are the only viable vehicles for political change in the country. How they expect to implement this change, however, given their lack of legal access to a constitutionally based executive power structure, remains unclear. END COMMENT.

CARTER